

and the nurses knew
everybody knew
but he just went on talking to me
about his next novel,
he had an unusual plot idea
and I told him it sounded
great,
and after a visit or two more
his wife phoned me one afternoon
and told me that
it was over ...

it's all right, John, nobody has ever
written the last one,
some only think they have.

you were really tough on those nurses, though,
and that pleased me, the way you got them
running in there in their crinkled whites,
you proved me more than right
in my assertion
that your power of command
with a simple language was
one of the most magnificent things of
our century.

MY FRIEND

I loved bar room fights in bar room
alleys.
I fought the biggest meanest men
I could find.
the patrons thought I was
brave.

but it was something else, something
that walked and slept and sat with
me, and it ate with me when I ate,
and it drank with me, and I drank.
and I saw it everywhere: inside loaves
of bread, along the back of a mouse
running up a wall, I saw it through
the rips of a window shade, I saw it
inside the bodies of beautiful women;
I never saw it in the sun but I saw it
in the rain and I noted it in the in-
sects; and I saw it riding in busses
and trolly cars filled with human
heads;
I saw it in a dresser drawer when I
pulled it open,

and I saw it in the faces of the
bosses with their dumb wet lips and
their little rivet eyes: blue, brown,
green;
I heard it in the click of timeclocks,
saw it spread like powder across the
faces of my religious landladies;
I saw it along the bare carpeted
stairways
always seeming to lead to some 2nd
floor of some rooming house in
Houston, in New Orleans, in St. Louis,
in L.A., in Frisco, wherever I was,
and I saw it in the doorknob and I saw
it in the room sitting on the quilt
on the bed
waiting nicely
nicely waiting ...

and in some bar
after hours of drinking
somebody saying, "hey, Hank, you
ever tried Big Eddie?"
Big Eddie grins, I see it in his
teeth, I finish my beer,
nod at him, get up, walk toward
the rear entrance, Big Eddie and
the crowd following, and outside
I see it in the moon and the bricks
as the patrons lay their bets
I am the underdog, and as Big
Eddie charges I see it in his
feet and along the buttons of
his shirt and I hear a horn
honk somewhere far off, and
it's a decent a time as a man
can expect.

YOU CAN'T TELL A TURKEY BY ITS FEATHERS

my son, my father said, if you only had some
ambition, you have no
get up and go! no
drive!
it's hard for me to believe that you are really
my son.

yeah, I
said.